

Panel Discussion : A Research Proposal on Managing Community Perceptions of Environmental Risks Associated with Large-Scale Construction Projects in China

著者	Fang Dongping, Loosemore Martin
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TITLE

A Research Proposal on Managing Community Perceptions of Environmental Risks Associated with Large-Scale Construction Projects in China

Professor Dongping Fang (Tsinghua University, China)

Professor Martin Loosemore (University of New South Wales, Australia)

AIMS AND BACKGROUND

The overall objective of the research is to develop an environmental assessment framework which extends traditional indicators into the community thereby enabling more effective community consultation, a better understanding of how project impacts are perceived by different stakeholders and more sustainable and socially sensitive project outcomes.

The aims of this research are to:

1. Investigate the nature and extent of environmental risks posed by large construction projects in China.
2. Identify the range of community stakeholders affected and the risks posed to each.
3. Assess stakeholders' perceptions of those risks and how they are shaped.
4. Investigate differences between stakeholder risk perceptions and objective measures of risk.
5. Investigate how best to engage communities to achieve environmentally sustainable project outcomes.

SIGNIFICANCE AND INNOVATION

The significant innovations in this research are:

- *Theoretically* – The integration and use of contagion theory, social network theory and social identity theory to map and understand the process by which environmental risk perceptions are shaped in the community. Current research in this area has a weak theoretical base. This research will create a valid and reliable theoretical foundation which could provide the basis for future research.
- *Conceptually* – A significant contribution to mainstream management theory by using construction as a context to understand how and why communities should be integrated into decision-making processes. Past research has focused, almost exclusively, on the ecological and technical aspects of environmental risk ignoring social and cultural impacts. It has also been highly objective in assessing risk, ignoring community perceptions, which often differ from objective assessments.
- *Practically* – The production of an environmental assessment framework which will extend traditional physical indicators of sustainability to embrace social and cultural community impacts. This will result in a better understanding for construction managers of how their projects impact upon local communities and the production of an assessment framework, enabling practicing managers to consult more effectively with communities and employ more environmentally sensitive practices.
- *Methodologically* - The combination of research methods from sociology, anthropology and the behavioural sciences is unique, particularly in built environment research. Research in this field is widely criticised for being predictable and unimaginative; relying too heavily upon linear, reductionist methods of data collection and analysis.